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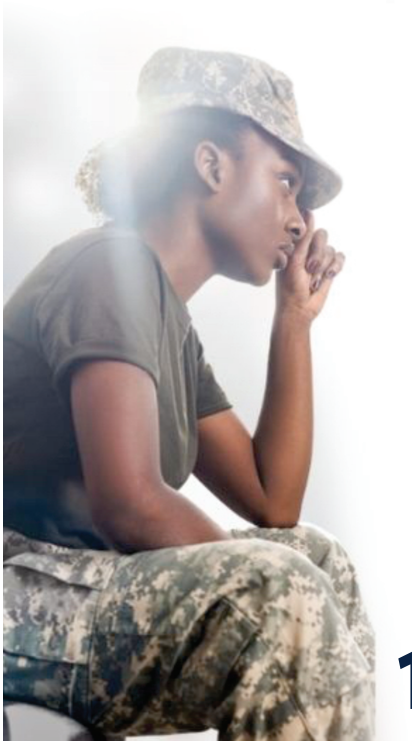

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EDITORIAL
Managing Editor Randy Stern 612-461-8723
Editorial Assistant Linda Raines 612-436-4660
Editor Emeritus Ethan Boatner
Editorial Associate George Holdgrafer
Contributors Lilly Ball, Ashley Berning, Brett Burger, Conlan Carter, Chris Hinze , Isaac Johnson, Ellen Krug, Steve Lenius, Jennifer Parello, Linda Raines, E.R. Shaffer, Jamez L. Smith, Andrew Stark, Carla Waldemar, Mae Whitney

ADVERTISING
Vice President of Sales & Advertising
Barry Leavitt 612-436-4690
Account Executives
Nathan Johnson 612-436-4695
Richard Kranz 612-436-4675
Advertising Associate George Holdgrafer
Sales & Event Administration
Linda Raines 612-436-4660
National Sales Representatives
Rivendell Media 212-242-6863

CREATIVE
Creative/Digital Director Mike Hnida 612-436-4679
Photographer Sophia Hantzes

ADMINISTRATION
Publisher Lavender Media, Inc.
President & CEO Stephen Rocheford 612-436-4665
Chief Financial Officer Mary Lauer 612-436-4664
Administrative Assistant Ohna Sullivan 612-436-4660
Distribution Metro Periodical Partners 612-281-3249
Founders George Holdgrafer, Stephen Rocheford
Inspiration Steven W. Anderson (1954-1994), Timothy J. Lee (1968-2002), Russell Berg (1957-2005), Kathryn Rocheford (1914-2006), Jonathan Halverson (1974-2010), Adam Houghtaling (1984-2012), Walker Pearce (1946-2013), Tim Campbell (1939-2015), John Townsend (1959-2019)

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612-436-4660 **Office**
612-436-4660 **Subscriptions/Distribution**
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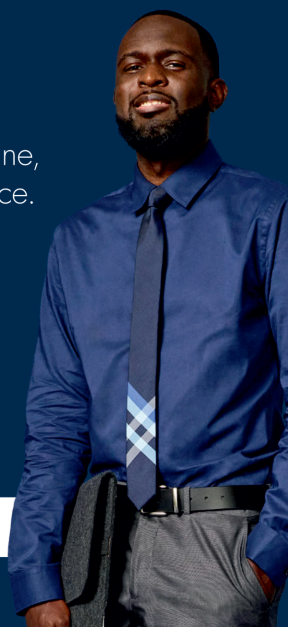

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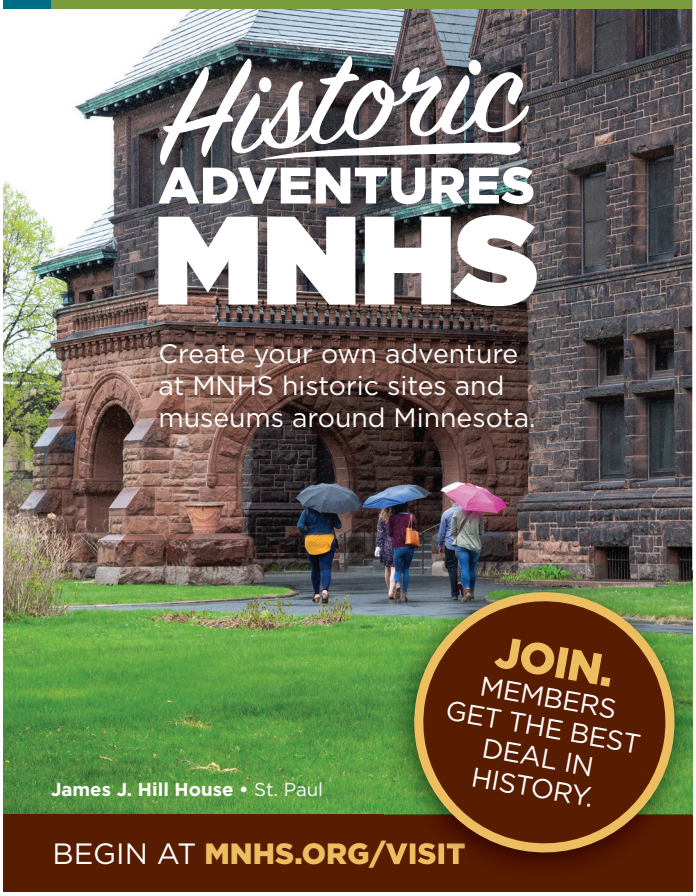

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Pride Season Starts Here!

BY RANDY STERN | PHOTO BY RANDY STERN

When you travel across this state and beyond its borders, do you seek out their LGBTQ community?

When you do, will you find that community's Daffyd Thomas?

If you have not watched the television show, *Little Britain*, then you have not been acquainted with what he would call himself only LGBTQ person in a small Welsh mining town, portrayed by the absolutely funny Matt Lucas. Daffyd celebrates himself even if there is another LGBTQ person in his presence.

Over the years, smaller communities across Minnesota and along the state line have been celebrating LGBTQ Pride in their own backyards. From La Crosse to Fargo, Fort Frances to Sioux Falls, our community comes together in celebration of ourselves and our culture.

These celebrations also happen within the Twin Cities. These communities, including Columbia Heights, West St. Paul, and Bloomington, also roll out the rainbow carpet for us to connect in a community level by bringing neighbors together in celebration.

If you have not been to any of these smaller Pride celebrations, it is worth attending! I have been to several of these celebrations across our region, including Pine City, Duluth-Superior, Rochester, Mankato, Fargo-Moorhead, La Crosse, Brainerd, Golden Valley, and Columbia Heights.

There's a lot more to explore this year. I'll make it my goal to try to head to one that I have never attended before. Simply because they're fun to attend! And, you'll never know who you'll run into there!

These smaller LGBTQ Pride celebrations feel more localized and concentrated than a larger celebration at a major city. You get a great sense of how they celebrate the LGBTQ community within the confines of their city. In turn, you experience smaller crowds and meet new faces. Even, new places to explore!

That is why we compiled some up-to-date information on these smaller Pride celebrations by giving you the where, the when, and what to do when you are in attendance. It may be just a great weekend getaway or a day trip for you to partake in the fun!

This year, plan a visit to one of these Pride celebrations we listed in this issue. Experience something new to expand your LGBTQ horizons, add more people to your friendship circle, and fly your colors high and proud!

I might even see you there! ▮

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Pride Is A Many-Venued Thing

BY E.B. BOATNER

Pride's not all about gigantic floats and parades but can blossom in small towns as well.

After the Stonewall uprising of June 28, 1969, in anniversary was celebrated by gay pride marches in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco.

Over the years, the Twin City crowds swelled from a first 50 at Nicollet Mall in 1972 to 400,000 and more, while smaller, more rural areas were starting to develop their own Pride celebrations that offer more locations and a selection of dates allowing many without the means to travel, to take off work or afford weekend lodging share in the celebrations and raise their voices to Say Gay loudly and proudly.

Here are several of this year's venues:

EAST CENTRAL MINNESOTA PRIDE

Pride in the Park, the ECMP's 17th, on June 4, Noon to 5 PM at Robinson Park, Town Square, Pine City. Billed as "Minnesota's Small-Town LGBTQ+ Pride" this year's theme is "Growing in Pride," featuring Host Martina Marraccino, New Salty Dog, and Mark Joseph & The American Soul.

They're still welcoming help in planning and information is available on www.EastCentralMinnesotaPride.org and eastcentralminnesotapride@gmail.com and vendor coordinator at beigeville2012@gmail.com. Their poster is bordered with the names of some 40 participating towns, including Askov, Finlayson, Isanti, Ogilvie, Quamba, Sturgeon Lake, and Wyoming.

BEMIDJI PRIDE

Saturday, August 27 • RailRiverFolkSchool 303 Railroad Street SW, Bemidji 56601 – check for details Bemidji's Annual LGBTQS2+ Pride Festival

DULUTH-SUPERIOR PRIDE FESTIVAL

On September 1-4 the 36th year of Pride in the Twin Ports offers boat- and trainloads of events from the Mayor's opening reception on Thursday the 1st and culminating on the 4th with a grand parade along Tower Avenue in Superior, followed by the Foo Foo Choo Choo (must be 21) three-hour train ride on the North Shore Scenic Railroad 3:30-6:30 PM. Go to duluthsuperiorpride.com for particulars and prices.

Duluth-Superior obviously doesn't fall under "Small Town Pride," but the port towns offer unique ways to disport in an area more accessible to many disporters.

ST. CLOUD PRIDE IN THE PARK

St. Cloud's 13th annual, family friendly event features local food vendors, friendship, and fun September 11th – 18th. Pride Parade kicks off the week on Sunday at 2PM in Downtown St. Cloud. Check online for entry rules and regulations, deadlines, fees per float, times, map, and other details at info@stcpride.org. Parade will start at Convention Center Lot, 10 4th Ave S.

It takes a tremendous amount of planning, strategizing, logistics, and just plain elbow grease to make a wonderful weekend or week look like a mere snap of the fingers. Help is welcome, and you can offer assistance at many levels. Don't hesitate to contact the venue of your choice and see what's needed. Then join in at the venue that fits your schedule and Say Gay! ▮

NOTE: It's a good plan to check your preferred venue from time to time, hours and activities change, so be sure you keep up to date.

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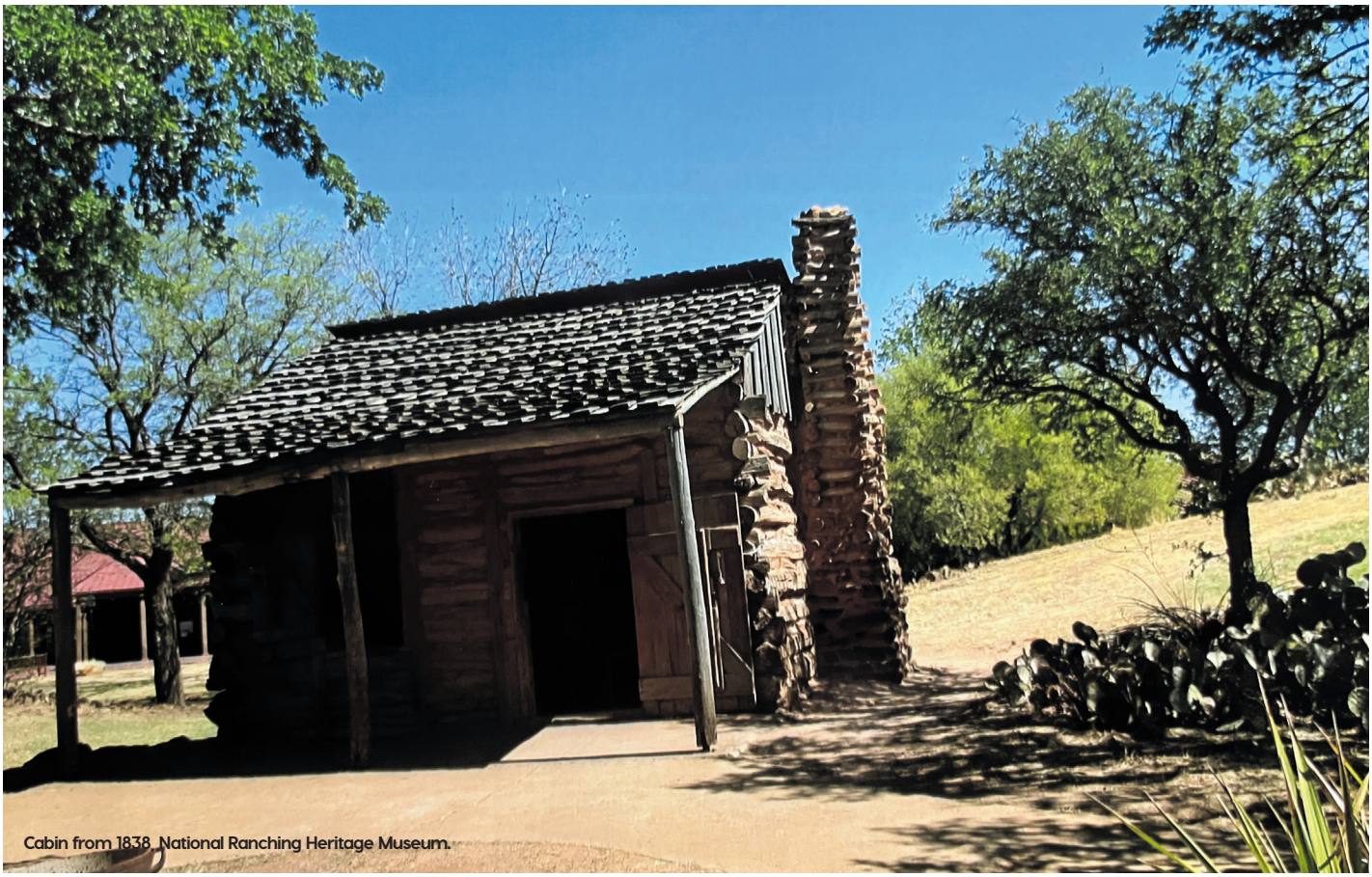

Cabin from 1838, National Ranching Heritage Museum.

Deep In The Heart of Lubbock

BY CARLA WALDEMAR | PHOTOS BY CARLA WALDEMAR

If what happens in Texas stays in Texas, you'd never hear a thing about Lubbock. And that would be a crying shame. You'd never know that this happening city, rising from the state's northwest flatlands, harbors a must-see cache of open-air, public art; offers you-are-there lessons in ranching history; boasts world-class wineries; supports a bleeding-edge food scene; and flaunts a musical heritage born of its most famous homeboy.

His name—all together now—is Buddy Holly. The rock legend was born here in 1936, and the story of his rise to fame is told via films and artifacts in the Buddy Holly Museum, where you'll find his guitar and his boyhood collection of 45 rpms. It's here in Lubbock he opened for Elvis in 1955. Line up for a photo beside his trademark black specs, larger than life on the front lawn.

These days, he's also honored at the brand-new Buddy Holly Hall, hosting Broadway shows, ballet, theater and music in a state-of-the-art auditorium which even cranky Bob Dylan praised, and *"Hamilton"* will soon launch a two-week run.

Cutting-edge public art rules in Lubbock, too. On the Texas-sized campus of Texas Tech, over 100 site-specific commissioned outdoor pieces invite visitors to get up-close and personal. Tour this forward collection with a guide and golf cart or via a downloaded app. (Yes, that's a Deborah Butterfield horse, twin to the one in the Walker's Sculpture Garden.)

Across town at the Charles Adams Studio Project, a live/work space for print and metal artists, peep into galleries, where voyeurs are welcome. As Director Chad Plunkett declares, "Lubbock's art scene is a hidden gem with no reason to stay hidden."

That welcome extends to the National Ranching Heritage Museum, where trolley tours or DIY strolls lead history aficionados through 19 acres lodging 55 historic Texas structures repositioned here, starting with a stucco building circa 1780. "Ranching is national," explains our guide, "but it started here in Texas, where we're sitting on the largest flatlands in the U.S." Flatlands that

Winemaker Kim McPherson of McPherson Cellars proves "Texas wine" is not an oxymoron.

are dry and rocky as a moonscape—no wood, no water. “But, thanks to windmills, folks could settle here, after the Comanches were driven out.” Ogle a ranch cabin of 1838, a half dugout (“that’s how you started out on your bare land”), a 1855 dogtrot log house, built in two sections separated by a breezeway to forestall a kitchen fire. Peer at chinked logs full of bullet holes, where invading snakes were shot.

For native dwellings of a different sort—and a pure-fun photo op—head to Prairie Dog Village to watch the wild critters stand like sentinels atop their tunnels.

Those vast, dry, rocky plains turned out to be just fine for growing grapes, as pioneers like Kim McPherson demonstrate. “The wine business in Texas was started here in 1968 by my dad when a friend from afar, clearing his property, asked him, ‘Want these vines?’” McPherson Cellars, the winery he vine launched, is where Kim now bottles a stellar Portuguese-style Albarino (“that grape loves the hot, dry climate”), a Viogner blend, and his flagship Sangiovese—all Old World-style wines that allow the grapes to shine sans over-oaking.

Another winery proving that “Texas wines” is not an oxymoron is Llano Estacado, again showcasing grapes from the high desert in its gorgeous tasting room. “Rhone-type wines do well here, instructs its winemaker as he pours samples of Sauvignon Blanc, Rousanne, Sangiovese and his flagship Treviano, a Cabernet and Sangiovese blend.

Lubbock’s beer scene is equally robust these days. Brewery LBK is where winemaker Sally (from Crookston, Minnesota!) pours us a classy IPA, a German-style kolsch, and the brewery’s best-seller Unplugged Astronaut, a stellar hard lemonade.

New kid on the block, Auld Brewing Company, opened to the kind of generous community support that’s the signature of Lubbock. “Here, we’re most proud of our Linde Lager,” says brewer Ray Auld: “It’s the backbone of the brewery.”

After a pint, how about a cuppa? Complimentary tea is offered next door at the city’s newest bookstore, Wild Lark, in a sunny setting just made for browsing.

Best for last: Lubbock’s red-hot dining scene. After a bite or two, you’ll be able to brag of future James Beard Award winners that you got to know way back when. Actually, chef Finn Walter’s already taken home that prize for his work at The Nicollet. Dine alfresco in his kitchen’s airy greenhouse on a menu that salutes the high plains. Start with peekytoe

Pies for breakfast at Cast Iron Grill.

Buddy Holly’s statue in his hometown of Lubbock, Texas.

crab atop a carpaccio of cactus and pears or elk tartare scented with juniper. Continue with a mélange of hominy, chilies and peppers in chicken stock or agnolotti with cauliflower and sherry in a cheddary cream. Proceed to beef cheek ‘brisket’ with truffle and cheesy potatoes or oxtail with black mint, pine nuts, and pistachios.

Chef Cameron West raises the bar at West, where his don’t-miss dinner menu leads off with an order of crab hushpuppies and another of goat cheese croquettes bathed in jalapeno-berry jam. Continue with the elite bone marrow or grilled Bobwhite quail. If you’re still upright, graduate, as I did, to the rack of lamb given a Grecian twist with pairings of an orzo-feta toss and tzatziki-apricot glaze. Most popular at our table: his Crying Tiger bistro steak in Thai marinade with basil fried rice. And, hey! Sopapillas for dessert!

Next, snare a flight of Spanish tapas at La Diosa Cellars, sporting wild Frida murals on the walls of its magical setting and a menu that leaps from flash-fried peppers showered with feta to onion- and jalapeno-boosted meatballs; from smoked salmon croquettes to pork belly with tequila-mango glaze.

Time for something Granny might recognize? Something more traditionally Texan? Ellie Mae’s BBQ (voted #8 among all Texas BBQ joints) fills the bill with her best-selling brisket. “In Texas, it’s all about the meat, and beef is the biggest thing”—well, next to her showcase of homemade pies, starting with an ethereal lemon meringue and seguing to strawberry, key lime and, oh! Banana pudding!

It’s chicken you crave? Then Dirk’s is the answer for fried. Korean-style. Nashville hot—you name it. Sitting at the next table were what appeared to be Lubbock’s entire fire department, keeping up their strength at mid-day through the artistry of Chef Cameron West (of fancier West, above).

This is not a town where’s it’s wise (or legal) to skip breakfast. Head to Sugar Brown’s for jalapeno kolaches. Don’t miss the Iron Grill for a down-home diner breakfast (biscuits and gravy to huevos rancheros) served by lasses in minimal jean shorts and cowboy boots. Its Faith Room honors Jesus and his (hitherto undocumented) devotion to eggs over easy.

Can’t wait? That’s what airplanes are for. ∎

GAY BARS

OHM Nightclub and Bar—Lubbock’s newest gay dance club
Club Pink—dine-in too
Kong’s—dance club with happy hour specials
Chuy’s—Tex-Mex specialties shine here
Pride: 2022 will be Lubbock’s 10th

Calendar of Regional and Small Town Prides

Photo courtesy of BigStock/natatravel

MAY 21, 2022
ROCHESTER PRIDE
Soldiers Memorial Field Park, Rochester, MN
12:00 PM – 5:00 PM
www.rochmnpride.org

JUNE 2 – 4, 2022
PRIDEFEST
Henry Meier Festival Park, Milwaukee, WI
www.facebook.com/mkepride

JUNE 4, 2022
EAST CENTRAL MN PRIDE
Robinson Park, Pine City, MN
12:00 PM – 5:00 PM
www.eastcentralminnesotapride.org

JUNE 5, 2022
NORTHFIELD PRIDE IN THE PARK
Central Park, Northfield, MN
12:00 PM – 4:00 PM
www.mynpl.libcal.com/event/7734141

JUNE 10-12, 2022
LAKE PEPIN PRIDE
Stockholm, WI
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www.facebook.com/lakepepinpride

JUNE 10-12, 2022
CAPITAL CITY PRIDE
Des Moines, IA
www.facebook.com/CapitalCityPrideIowa

JUNE 11, 2022
HASTINGS PRIDE
Jaycee Park, Hastings, MN
11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
www.ideaorganization.org/upcoming-events

JUNE 11, 2022
EAU CLAIRE PRIDE
Phoenix Park, Eau Claire, WI
11:00 AM – 4:00 PM
www.cvlgbt.org/pride

JUNE 11, 2022
BORDERLAND PRIDE
Rainy Lake Square, Fort Frances, ON
www.facebook.com/BorderlandPride

JUNE 17-19, 2022
BRAINERD LAKES PRIDE
Gregory Park, Brainerd, MN
www.facebook.com/brainerdlakespride

JUNE 18, 2022
SIOUX FALLS PRIDE
8th & Railroad Center, Sioux Falls, SD
11:00 AM – 5:00 PM
www.facebook.com/SiouxFallsPride

JUNE 18, 2022
IOWA CITY PRIDE
Iowa City, IA
www.facebook.com/iowacitypride

JUNE 23-26, 2022
FERGUS PRIDE
Fergus Brewing Co. and Pebble Lake Beach, Fergus Falls, MN
www.facebook.com/FergusFallsSAGA

JUNE 25-26, 2022
TWIN CITIES PRIDE
Loring Park, Minneapolis, MN
www.tcpride.org

JULY 9, 2022
WEST ST. PAUL PRIDE
West Saint Paul Sports Complex, St. Paul, MN
11:00 AM
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JULY 9, 2022
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BLOOMINGTON PRIDE
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AUGUST 18-21, 2022
TWIN CITIES BLACK PRIDE 2022 FESTIVAL
Minneapolis, MN
www.mnpocpride.org

AUGUST 21, 2022
OUTREACH MAGIC PRIDE FESTIVAL
Warner Park, Madison, WI
www.outreachmadisonlgbt.org/events

AUGUST 26 – 27, 2022
CEDAR VALLEY PRIDE
West 4th Street, Waterloo, IA
FRI 5:30 PM- 12:00 AM; SAT 12:00 PM – 12:00 AM
www.facebook.com/cedarvalleypride

AUGUST 27, 2022
BEMIDJI PRIDE
Rail River Folk School, Bemidji, MN
www.facebook.com/BemidjiPride

SEPTEMBER 1-4, 2022
DULUTH SUPERIOR PRIDE
Bayfront Park, Duluth, MN
SAT: 11:00 AM
Parade on Tower Avenue, Superior, WI
SUN: 12:00 PM
www.duluthsuperiorpride.com

SEPTEMBER 10, 2022
LA CROSSE PRIDE
Riverside Park, La Crosse, WI
11:00 AM-6:00 PM
www.facebook.com/lacrosse.pride

SEPTEMBER 10, 2022
SOUTH CENTRAL MINNESOTA PRIDE
Parade down Riverfront Dr., Festival at Riverfront Park, Mankato, MN
www.facebook.com/scmnpride

SEPTEMBER 11-18, 2022
ST. CLOUD PRIDE
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Columbia Heights Is Full Of Pride

BY E.R. SHAFFER

For this Small Town Pride issue of *Lavender*, I got the chance to interview Mayor Amáda Márquez Simula on what to expect for the 2022 Pride celebration in her city of Columbia Heights. The Mayor has been an integral part of the Columbia Heights Pride organization since its first inception. It was through her work as a community organizer that she first heard the suggestion of doing a Pride festival for the city. While the initial reaction from the government was unsupportive, the outcry from the community cemented her resolve.

"The rest of the council, the city- the support just came from everywhere," Márquez Simula said. Columbia Heights held its first Pride celebration in 2019 to great success and continued in 2020 with a virtual event. This year, like last year, will be in person, and there will be plenty to look forward to. One important thing to remember though- this festival will be held in October.

"We had talked about doing it in June," the Mayor reflects, "But all of our volunteers would want to go to Twin Cities Pride. So, we don't want to compete with that. We also really enjoyed having it in the fall- you know summer can get so busy, people are traveling…and the only weekend that worked between all of the volunteers being able to be there ended up being October! But we loved it." The later date also gives the chance for the local high school's Gay/Straight Alliance to get involved. "That's important to us- we're trying to be inclusive to all ages."

So, what can be expected of the event this year? Well, much is still in the planning stages, but past Prides (held in Sullivan Lake Park) have included food trucks, local vendors, face painting, live entertainment, and the 'Pride of Homes' Tour, where Columbia Heights residents are encouraged to create outdoor lawn exhibits in recognition of Pride!

The event itself is organized by Heights Next, a non-profit organization that Márquez Simula helped create.

"Height's Next mission is to promote sustainability and community building." She tells me, "And we truly see that- having the neighborhood support us, the local church, to provide that parking is huge."

She also shared her experience with the police.

"The police understand that it hasn't been the best…there hasn't been the best relationship with police and the LGBTQ community in the past. In Columbia Heights I feel like it's a very good relationship but people visiting this might not know that."

Photo courtesy of Columbia Heights Pride

Márquez Simula has been in conversation with the police even prior to her position as Mayor and says that the understanding is clear that while their overt presence might not be welcomed at Pride, they are ready and on hand should they be called upon. "That's been really helpful," She adds, "The city is very respectful of the community and the history that there has been before and wanting to make sure they are appropriate."

The mayor also wanted to highlight the family-friendly nature of the event.

"There's other Pride festivals that are more for adults. And this one we really wanted to be like a daytime fun festival, for families. And the turnout we have seen has just been so heartwarming."

Mayor Márquez Simula's commitment to the public really shone through in our conversation, as she spoke passionately on her allyship to the queer community. Progress cannot be made without passionate public officials like her, and I'm sure all those who get the chance to experience Columbia Heights Pride will be able to see that passion on full display. ∎

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Bloomington Pride

BY RANDY STERN

Bloomington had been home to two major sports venues, both of which had been removed for the state's number one destination – Mall of America.

However, the city also hosts their own Pride celebration. In fact, this will be their second Bloomington Pride Celebration. This celebration will take place on Saturday, August 13th at Civic Plaza East Lawn (1800 W. Old Shakopee Road).

Photo by Randy Stern

This Pride is unique because it is put on by the City of Bloomington, Expect a festive, civic atmosphere on the lawn in front of the Bloomington Center For The Arts.

After the Pride Celebration, Bloomington offers a whole host of places to eat within a mile from Civic Plaza. Along 98thAvenue and Lyndale Avenue, you have lots of choice for a post-Pride meal.

However, Bloomington is best known for the Mall of America. With a future expansion coming in the next few years, you can still enjoy exceptional shopping, dining, and entertainment that still attracts millions to this 30-year-old mall.

The city also has an exceptional park system to unwind after the Pride Celebration. In West Bloomington, Hyland Hills, Bush Lake, and Anderson Lakes offers a multitude of year-round activities across its 2,611-plus acres of parkland.

Because of the Pride Celebration's location, out-of-towners can stay nearby at hotel clusters around the Mall of America/Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, the West Bloomington/Edina area and down in Burnsville across from the Minnesota River.

If you're looking for an LGBTQ Pride just minutes away from your Twin Cities home, come to Bloomington on August 13th! ▮

Smokey Bear Park. Photo used with permission of the International Falls Journal

Borderland Pride

BY RANDY STERN

Like many Pride celebrations across North America, Borderland Pride stood dormant for LGBTQ people in International Falls, Minnesota and Fort Frances, Ontario due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

However, the organizers up by the U.S.A.-Canada border are ready to welcome their LGBTQ neighbors for a celebration. Part of this celebration will be a free concert by Canadian music sensation Choir! Choir! Choir! at Rainy Lake Square in Fort Frances on Saturday, June 11. The concert will start after the Pride march. Tickets will be required for the concert.

International Falls and Fort Frances are separated by the Rainy River and a single bridge as its international crossing. Nearby Rainy Lake and Voyageurs National Park provide opportunities for outdoor activities on land and in the water within minutes of both cities. On the American. and Canadian side of the border, both communities offer a relaxed atmosphere for everyone to enjoy.

Out of town visitors may find plenty of lodging in and around both cities. They range from motels to lodges and cabins. Summer is one of the region's high seasons, so check for rates before you go.

Before you go, check both the American Department of Homeland Security (www.dhs.gov) and the Canada Border Services Agency (www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca) for the latest border crossing information regards to documents and COVID-19 measures and requirements.

This is one of the most unique LGBTQ Pride events on our continent. With two countries celebrating together, it seems you can have double the fun! Plus, add a true north outdoors adventure on top of celebrating our community! ▮

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Photo by Randy Stern

Brainerd Lakes Pride

BY RANDY STERN

Our community can be found in various places across Minnesota. One of them is in the city of Brainerd and its nearby lakes.

Brainerd Lakes Pride kicks off their celebration on Friday night, June 17, with a dance party in downtown Brainerd. The next day, join the community for a family picnic at Gregory Park in Brainerd. The festivities will end with a Drag Brunch on Sunday at a location to be announced closer to their Pride weekend.

Brainerd and the nearby lakes offer great recreational opportunities. You can stay in Brainerd and Baxter to get closer to the community, but you can also head further north for some peace, quiet and spectacular landscape. After all, it is called Minnesota's Playground.

If you want to enjoy this playground, check out Gull Lake. It offers great boating and water-based activities from fishing to just reflecting on your Pride. Plus, Gull Lake is not the only body of water that is minutes from Gregory Park. The mighty Mississippi River flows through the region, too!

Gregory Park is just a couple of blocks off Washington Street – Brainerd's main street. There are plenty of places to eat along that street. You can also head towards Baxter along Minnesota Highway 371 for more dining options.

The small-town atmosphere of Brainerd is worthy of your getaway. It is a great hub for a community that stretches across Crow Wing County. The community is also full of energy, including its youthful residents. Put it on your map this year! ∎

Duluth-Superior Pride

BY TERRANCE GRIEP

The city of Duluth is named after Daniel Greysolon, Sieur du Lhut, one of Europe's most accomplished explorers, and the city, along her Twin Port twin, Superior, Wisconsin, honor the legacy of that title to this day…not by exploring the surrounding water and woods, but by exploring the wide variety of people who live there.

Photo by Randy Stern

The 36th annual Duluth-Superior Pride Festival will take place at its traditional time, Labor Day weekend—this year, that's September 1 though 4. Pride kicks off with the Mayor's Reception at the Duluth Depot at 5p on Thursday, September 1. That event includes live music, snacks, beverages—soft and not-so-soft—and a presentation to honor heroes of the local queer community.

The festival begins at 11:00 AM, Saturday, September 3, at Bayfront Festival Park. Here the northern Pride-goer will encounter beer tents and food trucks, merchandise exhibitors and merchandise vendors, along with the information booths that conduct the vital work of matching people with places. Bayfront Festival Park provides a main stage for Pride and the main stage provides a full day of entertainment, as well.

A particular source of local Pride is this festival's family-friendly nature—in support of that nature, activities for children and parents—the technical term is "fun and games," apparently–are easy to find.

The culminating tradition, the Pride parade will begin at high noon on Sunday, September 4th, "all along" Tower Avenue in Superior, an exploration of the city and its people that will do the Sieur du Lhut's memory proud.

www.duluthsuperiorpride.com ∎

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East Central Minnesota Pride (Pine City)

BY ISAAC JOHNSON

East Central Minnesota Pride will be holding their 17th annual Pride in the Park on Saturday, June 4, 2022, from 12:00 PM- 5:00 PM. The celebration will be held at Robinson Park, in downtown Pine City, Minnesota. The event is free to attend and features a wide variety of vendors and exhibitors, live music, food, arts activities, and entertainment. This year's entertainment includes New Salty Dog, Martina Marraccino, and the Wyoming Area Creative Arts Community's children's activities. There will also be a selection of food trucks and a quiet space for attendees on the Autism spectrum.

Photo by Nathan Johnson

Look for businesses that show their support by an "All Are Welcome Here" sticker or rainbow flag displayed in their storefronts. Pine City is located between two Minnesota Lakes connected by the Snake River. Be sure to check out Voyageur Park or take advantage of dockside pick up from Three Twenty Brewing and Pine City Pizza Pub, the A&W Drive in Restaurant which is far and above any establishment by the same name. The newly renamed and reopened The Garage features a rooftop patio and the Cabina Caffe features and up north cabin themed coffee shop. Across from the pride celebration is the freshly remodeled Pine Center for the Arts featuring the work of local artists.

The theme of this year's festival is "Growing in Pride". East Central Minnesota Pride has come a long way since their first picnic in the park in 2005. They've grown, thrived, and increased the awareness and support of LGBTQ people living in small towns and rural parts of East Central Minnesota. ▮

Eau Claire Pride

BY MAE WHITNEY

Eau Claire's 2022 Pride is hosted by Chippewa Valley LGBTQ+ Community Center and being help in Phoenix Park. This year's theme is "Renew," with the title in mind the organizers say the goal is to "reflect not only our hope that we can start to grow and thrive after the challenges of the last few years, but to celebrate the hard work and passion of so many who have nurtured our organization and given us the rich environment where we can reach for the sky." The artwork for this year's logo was created by local artist, Matthias Klein.

The celebration kicks off on June 11th and goes from 11AM to 4PM. The day is full of activities for attendees of any age. Live musical performances, fitness classes, a children's book reading, and even more are all open to the public. Don't forget to check out the afternoon drag show at 3:15PM!

Chippewa Valley LGBTQ+ Community Center not only organizes Eau Claire Pride but also provides services and has created "educational programs that promote well-being and unity" for local residents. They work to "achieve a Chippewa Valley whose LGBTQ+ Community is safe, accepted, respected, and protected" Consider attending this year's Pride or donating to support their cause! To learn more about events, activities, vendors, and announcements for Pride in Eau Claire go to www.cvlgbt.org/pride2022. ▮

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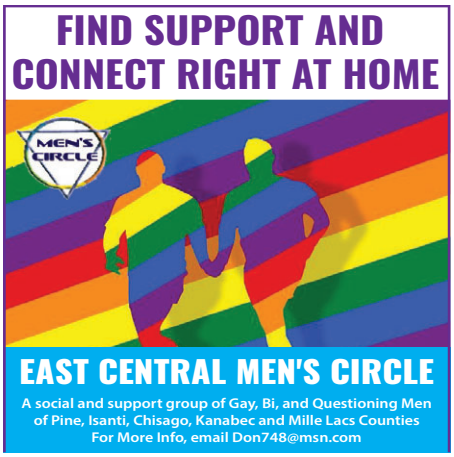
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Photo by Randy Stern

Fargo-Moorhead Pride

BY CONLAN CARTER

Fargo-Moorhead Pride 2022 runs from August 11th-14th. The schedule of events start off with the LGBTQ Trivia & Karaoke event, to be held on Thursday, August 11th at Rhombus Guys (606 Main Ave., Fargo, ND) from 8pm-2am. The place will be for ages 21 and over fropm 9:00 PM that evening. Also that evening will be the Family Skate Night at Skate City (3302 Interstate Blvd. S., Fargo, ND) and the Pride Vinyl Night being held at the Front Street Taproom (614 Main Ave., Fargo, ND).

On Friday, August 12, there will be the Youth Pride event, along with the Pride Dance Party at the Avalon Event Center (2525 9th Ave. S., Fargo, ND). More information is coming on Youth Pride.

Saturday's events start at Island Park (302 7th St. S, Fargo, ND) with Pride at the Park that runs from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. That evening, the Pride Block Party kicks off at the Fargo Brewing Company (610 N. University Dr., Fargo, ND) starting at 8:30 PM.

Before the parade starts in downtown Fargo, an Interfaith Service will be held at 12:30 PM at the Fargo Theatre downtown. Then, the parade marches down into downtown Fargo closing with a Post-Parade Celebration at Broadway Square.

Fargo-Moorhead Pride promises a jam-packed Pride weekend with events for all ages. Not to mention, enjoying the best Fargo and Moorhead has to offer – including all of the locations listed for these events.

For more information on all of these events, please visit www.fmpride.com. ▮

Fergus Falls Pride

BY RANDY STERN

Just in time for the city's 150th Anniversary, Fergus Falls and SAGA Youth (Sexuality and Gender Alliance) will be celebrating its Pride celebration June 23rd to the 26th.

Activities begin on the 23rd with local businesses open until 8:00 PM for a special fundraising campaign. At certain businesses, a percentage of the sales with benefit SAGA Youth. You can expect some food and live music – all of which has not been announced at this time.

Photo by Krystyne Frandson

On Friday, Peney Cakes will have some Pride-themed cupcakes and brownies available at the Fergus Brewing Co. from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. That is followed by the Fergus Pride Disco Fever dance at Fergus Brewing Co, from 7:00 Pm to 11:00 PM.

On Saturday, join in on the Fergus Pride Story Hour at the Fergus Falls Public Library starting at 10:00 AM. They will have coffee, donuts, juice and bagels, courtesy of Caribou Coffee. That evening, there will be a Drag Show at the Dinning Car #423/Steel Wheels starting at 8:00 PM.

Fergus Pride culminates with the Pride on the Beach Family Picnic at Pebble Lake Beach on Sunday from 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

With a weekend full of activities, you probably want some winddown time. Located near the source of the Mississippi River, Fergus Falls is a center for great recreational opportunities. With the Otter Trail Scenic Byway, you can enjoy great landscapes while taking the history and the beauty of this part of Minnesota.

Why not spend the day in Fergus Falls and celebrate Pride? ▮

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Golden Valley Pride

BY CONLAN CARTER

With an announcement made that Golden Valley Pride will not return to its normal park event at Brookview Park, there will be cause for celebration, nonetheless.

"Celebration comes in many forms," says Christopher Robinson, Golden Valley Pride Festival Committee Chair, "and we're excited to spend this year reuniting with our community through smaller events all summer."

Photo by Randy Stern

In the meantime, the Golden Valley Pride team is looking for volunteers! These will be for the smaller schedule of events that they are looking to do throughout the summer.

Golden Valley and the nearby communities has plenty of things to do. It is recommend to check out Mill Valley Market (Trailhead building, 1221 Theodore Wirth Pkwy., Golden Valley), Doolittle Woodfire Grill, (550 Winnetka Ave. N, Golden Valley) Outtakes Bar & Grill (2733 Winnetka Ave. N, New Hope), as well as the West End district (St. Louis Park) for dining and entertainment. There is great recreation to be had at Theodore Wirth Regional Park, ranging from golfing, gardens and trails to hike and bike along.

Follow Golden Valley Pride on Facebook or Instagram and go to www.goldenvalleypride.com to stay posted on summer events. ▮

Photo courtesy of Hastings Pride

Hastings Pride

BY ISAAC JOHNSON

Hastings Pride is on June 11th from 11:00 AM -10:00 PM. The celebration kicks off at 11:00 AM with a parade through the heart of town. Starting at McNamara field, the parade will head north on Eddy Street ending at Jaycee Park. The festival at Jaycee Park is the second annual family friendly pride that includes drag shows, king shows, games, face painting and many other activities. At 8:00 PM the adults-only portion of Hastings Pride will begin with a Pride bar crawl. Several downtown bars will be participating. A list will be provided at the event complete with entertainment and a party at The Onion Grille restaurant. Prior to the festival on June 9, there will be a pre-pride party at Spiral Brewery.

IDEA Hastings is proud to report a large list of LGBTQ-friendly businesses, found on their website. These include the Black Dirt Theater and LuminTheater Lab, the Pleasant Hill Library, several wellness, lifestyle, salon and spa brands, as well as the Fireside Social House, Froth & Cork, Geek Haven Coffee, Hawk Meadow Winery, and The Onion Grille to name a few.

Hastings Pride is hosted by the Inclusion, Diversity, & Equity Alliance of Hastings. IDEA Hastings is a local grassroots organization that is working with community, city and state officials to seek an end to the systemic barriers that perpetuate racism and improve inclusivity, diversity, and equality for BIPOC & LGBTQ+ community members. ▮

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Photo courtesy of the 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection

La Crosse Pride

BY MAE WHITNEY

Lacrosse has been celebrating Pride for sixteen years and is being organized by 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection also known as "The Center." The Center provides over a dozen family and youth centered programs for LGBTQ community members in La Crosse and surrounding areas.

Pride begins in June with the Pride Family Picnic on Saturday, June 11 at the Black River Beach Neighborhood Center in La Crosse. The picnic starts at 11:00 AM. A spokesperson for the event says "It is a time for family and friends to gather and show support for one another, while sharing food, games and socializing! This event is suitable for all ages and open to the public. Free food, beverages and loads of fun!"

The Center's official pride week kicks off on September 10th at Riverside Park. The festival starts at 11:00 AM and runs until 6:00 PM. There you can find artists, merchants, vendors, and performances. A spokesperson from The Center states that there will be "free fun for the whole family! Vendors, community groups, kids activities, food and more! We are committed to safety and ask that people wear masks (we will have sanitation stations available for all)."

The pièce de résistance of the whole week is undoubtedly So You Think You Can Drag, Join the party and support the cause! It is happening on Friday, September 16th starting at 9:00 PM at the La Crosse Center. According The Center, "attendees must be at least 21 years old to enter. One of our biggest events of the year, and our biggest fundraiser! Join LaCrosse's biggest and best drag show and drag competition with our hostess, Allota Shots, along with some of the best drag queens out there!."

Organizers are still accepting vendor applications. You can find contact information and the latest on La Crosse pride on their website www.7riverslgbtq.org.

www.7riverslgbtq.org/the-center-pride-week. ▮

Lake Pepin Pride

BY TERRANCE GRIEP

Last year, LGBTQ ally Jen Lindahl decided to create a happening that would bring every member of her 66-person, art-centric community together. A few phone calls, a few e-mails, lots of personal visits, and a fistful of pixie dust later, "the event came together in a matter of weeks and was a smashing success," according to the website of Lake Pepin Pride. Sure, it was small, but it also simply was, and by virtue of its mere was-ness, Lake Pepin Pride made history within the humble borders of Stockholm, Wisconsin.

Photo by Randy Stern

On Saturday, June 11, 2022, Lake Pepin Pride will re-make history. The first phase of this sequel is the free-of-charge, family-friendly "Celebration in the Park" which will put the camp in Stockholm Village Park Campground from 11a-3p. From 6p to 9p, a corresponding drag show will be presented just outside of Humble Moon Folkstead & Saloon…which might be the first time the notions of "drag show" and "humble" have appeared in the same sentence anywhere, ever.

The three hour gap between the local Pride's two most obvious aspects will give the restless visitor time to check out shops in town, perhaps taking home a bit of lore in the form of pottery, jewelry, home décor, framed photographs, or even decorative metalwork from the one-of-kind shops and boutiques that pepper the small town streets. By doing so, said visitor is sure to gain an appreciation of why Stockholm describes itself as a "Small Village with a Big heART."

www.lakepepinpride.com. ▮

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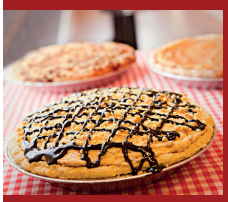

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Northfield Pride

BY ISAAC JOHNSON

Northfield's second annual Pride in the Park will be celebrated on Saturday June 4, 2022 from 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM at Central Park. The event will be emceed by Sven Sundgaard and Robby McEachren. The entertainment line up starts with a Drag Story Hour with Old Man Zimmer and Sid Sity, followed by Pride Cardio with the Northfield YMCA. Then Representative Angie Craig will take to the stage to give a few remarks. Then the stage will be warmed up for the open runway with Mrs. Moxie, where all are welcome to strut their stuff onstage! More entertainment and activities are still to be determined.

Photo by Emily Lloyd

In Northfield, the Cannon River, adjacent to downtown and near the park, has a riverwalk you can stroll, catch the breeze, pick up some soft-serve or a smoothie from The Blast. Tanzenwald Brewing Company features an all-gender restroom and two lovely patios. You can also stop at the charming LGBTQ-friendly independent Content Books and Toy store or the Bearded Mermaid a LGBTQ-friendly vintage store with primarily masculine-presenting clothing. There are also two LGBTQ-friendly coffee shops, Little Joy Coffee and The HideAway Coffeehouse and Wine Bar. The HideAway is offering 10% off your bill to Pride-goers who present a flier available at Pride in the Park.

Northfield's Pride in the Park is hosted by the Northfield Public Library and has huge support from the community with participants including many local businesses and organizations. Stop by and say hello to folks from local schools, churches, youth and art organizations as well as Plush Pup, Tandem Bagels, and Homebody MN, a trans-owned candle business. ▮

Photo by Madison Kelly

Rochester Pride

BY ISAAC JOHNSON

Rochester Pride will be held on Saturday May 21, 2022, from 12:00 PM -5:00 PM at Soldiers Memorial Field Park in Rochester, Minnesota. There will be over 75 regional vendors to explore, educational programming for all ages, and collaborative art activities for youth. The musical entertainment lineup at the park includes Audrey Robinson, Suzy Plays Guitar, FABBAulous, Hair of the Dog, and Rebel Queens. The celebration will continue with a pride themed trivia event at Little Thistle Brewery from 6pm-8 pm and "pride after dark" at Glynner's Pub from 9pm-1 am.

In Rochester you'll want to check out Taco JED, within walking distance of Soldiers Memorial Field Park, Crave Rochester for the drag brunches, Fiddlehead Coffee for their Thirsty ThursGAYS, and Old Abe Coffee Co. for their full vegan menu. For art appreciators there is the Rochester Art Center, Art Heads Emporium, Treedome, and Threshold Arts offering exhibitions, classes, and shopping. There is also Gray Duck Theater & Coffeehouse, an independent movie theater and coffee shop with a history of hosting events to support Rochester Pride.

Founded in 2019, Rochester Pride is a continuation of Rochester's Pridefest that began in 1998. This will be their second pride under the new organization. Rochester boasts of a substantial international population and Rochester Pride strives to provide pride events to "refashion the city" as a welcoming and inclusive place for everyone – LGBTQ, BIPOC, Trans and their allies. ▮

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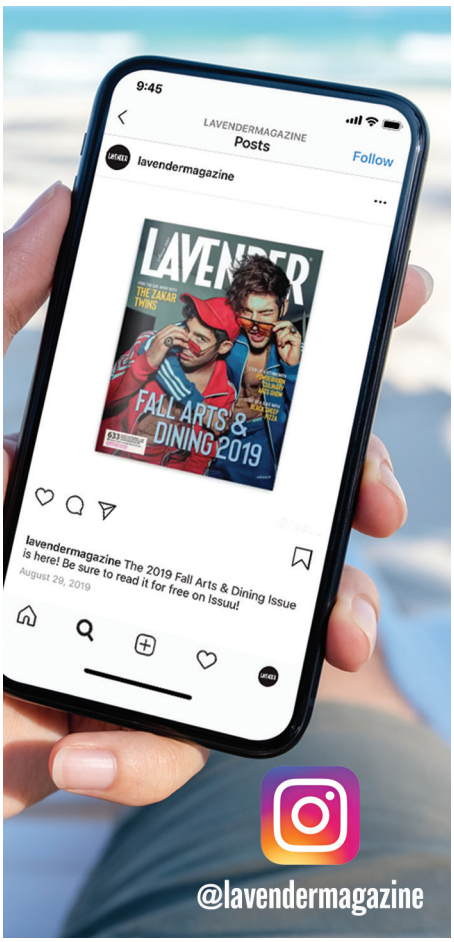
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Photo courtesy of Rachel Polan

Sioux Falls Pride

BY MAE WHITNEY

Sioux Falls Pride Month is packed with special events, activities, and performances through June. Rachel Polan, Marketing Director from Sioux Falls Pride, tells us that "We are particularly excited about the Two-Spirit Powwow hosted in partnership with South Dakota Urban Indian Health this year. That will be Thursday, June 16th in the evening." She says that this year's Pride is a celebration of the diverse voices in our local LGBTQA+ and Two-Spirit community."

The main parade and following festival will be held Saturday June 18th. The parade starts at 10AM on 8th and Dakota in bustling Downtown Sioux Falls. The Railroad Center hosts the official festival begins at 11AM and ends at 5PM. You can expect performances from local drag stars, a family friendly atmosphere, and kids corner. For the 21+ crowd, don't forget to check out the after party and beer garden!

This year's goal is to create a safe space for LGBTQ residents amidst a recent influx of targeted legislation in South Dakota. The events of Pride Month welcome everyone from the surrounding Sioux Falls community. There are over a dozen events June 11th through 19th. Between Cabaret performances, axe throwing, bingo, drag bunch, and concerts, there is something for everyone. To learn more about upcoming Pride events and announcements in Sioux Falls go to www.siouxfallspride.org/pages/events. ▮

South Central Minnesota Pride

BY TERRANCE GRIEP

When living in Minnesota's Twin Cities, one of the gayest and gay-friendliest regions of North America, it's easy to forget that other parts of the world, the nation, and even the state, don't have it as good where tolerance is concerned. Many Greater Minnesota community members can feel like they have no community at all…which makes the work of South Central Minnesota Pride all the more important.

SCMN Pride began operation in the year 2002, its mission "to promote visibility and pride in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and allied communities in south central Minnesota." The group eventually grew into a nonprofit group that serves the community year-round, promoting perpetual Pride and outreach: two recurrent manifestations include "Queers & Beers" and "Queers & Coffee," mercifully non-simultaneous events that each invites local unicorns to "meet new people, make conversation, and help us build a better LGBTQ community."

Photo by Randy Stern

SCMN Pride's PrideFest is its oldest, largest community-builder, of course. In years past, its base of operation has been Riverfront Park—described in the city's website as "one of the gems of the Mankato park system." In years past, the PrideFest has taken place during the second weekend of September. As of press time, these particulars have not been worked out but can be found at SCMN Pride's website as soon as they're available.

"You are not alone," South Central Minnesota Pride reminds LGBTQ individuals residing within the Lake State's warmest third, "and we're here to prove it!"

www.scmnpride.org ▮

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Please send your cover letter and resume to Stephen Rocheford, President & CEO.
stephen.rocheford@lavendermagazine.com

St. Cloud Pride

BY CONLAN CARTER

St. Cloud Pride Week has it all, from Pride parades to drag shows for all ages! Join Pride-goers the third weekend of September for a colorful end to summer. This will run from September 11th-18th.

The main event will be St. Cloud Pride in the Park, to be held on Saturday, September 17th at Lake George/Eastman Park from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Scheduled entertainers will include Mia Claire, Cannery Row, Adam Hammer, and Oh So Easy. Plus, the festival will have some special events, including a Puppy Parade Fundraiser for Tri-County Humane Society, Artist Show Case Booth. Expect plenty of local food vendors, such as Trickster Tacos, Smokin Js BBQ, Mario's Italian Food Truck, Michele's Cookies, Living the Dream, and Tinacakes.

Photo by Sophia Hantzes

On Sunday, September 11, the Pride Parade is set to kick off in downtown St Cloud at 2:00 PM. Final details are being made as of going to press,

Other events that will make up St. Cloud Pride Week will include the St. Cloud Pride Drag Show on Saturday, September 17th at 8:00 Pm at the River's Edge Convention Center. This a 21-and-over event.

For those under 21, the Youth Dance Party will be held Friday, September 16th, starting at 5:00 PM at the Atwood Memorial Ballroom on the St. Cloud State University campus. After the Youth Dance Party on September 16th will be the All Ages Drag Show performed by the St. Cloud State Drag Troupe.

On Tuesday, September 13, the Pride & Peace Walk: will start at the Great River Regional Library in St. Cloud. The walk will end at the Lake George/Eastman Park.

For more information, visit www.stcpride.org. ▮

Photo courtesy of Zaylore Stout

Twin Cities Black Pride

BY TERRANCE GRIEP

According to the Center for American Progress, African American LGBTQ persons are more likely to experience discrimination within the LGBTQ community than their white counterparts. One possible remedy to this and other concerns is the Minnesota People of Color Pride Organization, or MN POC, which was formed in 2014.

MN POC's vision, according to its website, is "creating a new consciousness for the LGBTQ+ community by offering everyone a 'S.L.I.C.E. of Pride." That's an abbreviation, if you can't tell by the periods, one which refers to Sociability, Literary, Inclusion, Charity, and Education. MN POC's year-round purpose has been to serve the underserved, championing HIV health, engaging in civic work, and ceaselessly pursuing equity and equality.

Another way that MN POC serves the underserved is to put on its own festival, in conjunction with its big sister, Twin Cities Pride. The theme of 2022's version is "Black Magic Weekend: A Summer of Soul"…which probably prohibits an appearance from Pat Boone, for good or for ill. On Aug. 18 through August 21, this festival recognizes and celebrates inclusion within LGBTQ+ communities and cultural traditions, the diversity within diversity.

Like the lady sawed (or S.L.I.C.E.d) in half, the Twin Cities Black Pride Festival can be appreciated in several places over the course of the magic's duration. Please consult the crystal ball known as the event's website for the most up-to-date doings.

www.mnpocpride.org. ▮

West Saint Paul Pride Pride in the Park

BY CONLAN CARTER

West Saint Paul Pride will take place on Saturday, July 9th at the West Saint Paul Sports Complex. The complex is located at the intersection of Wentworth Aveuue East and Oakdale Avenue. The event starts at 11:00 AM and runs until 4:00 PM.

West Saint Paul Pride, started as a crowd-funded picnic in 2019 to celebrate the inclusive and LGBTQ+-friendly city of West St. Paul, is back again! Previous iterations have included food vendors, music, and silent auctions.

Other events that will be part of West Saint Paul Pride includes the POUND for PRIDE event being held on Saturday, July 9th at 9:30am. This is a pre-pride workout class designed for all fitness levels. The invitation is to "come celebrate PRIDE month with rockin' pounding music, big time laughs, and a sweaty good workout! Stay to celebrate West Saint Paul Pride 2022 with our community!"

There are plenty of things to do in this suburb south of Saint Paul. The best local places to visit in and around West Saint Paul are the Black Hart located near Allianz Field, Camp Bar in downtown Saint Paul, the Happy Gnome, W.A. Frost Restaurant, Cafe Astoria, and Rice Park in downtown Saint Paul.

More details are still forthcoming for 2022, and to stay on top of news about the event, follow the West Saint Paul Pride Festival event on Facebook. You can also log on to their website at www.wsppride.com. ∎

Photo by Sophia Hantzes

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A Subaru Made For The Wilderness

BY RANDY STERN | PHOTOS BY RANDY STERN

One of favorite vehicles just got an attitude adjustment.

Let's be honest, we love our Subaru Foresters. They provided us the space to go out on the town, take home the shopping – from the big box stores to small gardening centers – carry our pets – especially big dogs – and head out of town with a cargo hold full of everything we need for a week away.

Continue on page 38

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Being a favorite vehicle of ours, we often wonder whether we should modify it. Not like an WRX STi, but something more rugged. Perhaps on the cusp of wanting to take it beyond the dirt road to the cabin by the lake.

Well, someone at Subaru have been noticing how their owners have been modifying their Foresters towards making them more off-road ready. They looked at their current Forester and thought "if we raised the ground clearance by 0.5-inches, would that make a difference."

They not only raised the ground clearance, Subaru went a bit further. They gave it all-terrain tires, a set of smaller 17-inch wheels, an enhanced X-Mode with a lower ratio and additional traction settings, extra cladding everywhere, a skid plate underneath, and water repellent seating.

The sum of all of this is called the 2022 Subaru Forester Wilderness.

What I just described is Subaru's way to add more ruggedness to their key models – not just the Forester. You can get the Wilderness trim in the Outback, as well.

The Forester Wilderness might be a better package. Think of why you would choose a Forester over an Outback. I know, it's a tough decision among loyal LGBTQ Subaru owners. We love them both – and have plenty of reasons to justify what we own.

The Forester does offer better interior space, as mentioned before. It is roomier and comfortable for four-to-five humans – plus pets. It can take up to 69.1 cubic feet of space with the rear seats down. Although, the 26.9 cubic feet of cargo space with the rear seats up is more than adequate for weekends away at the cabin – or that run to REI or Cabella's for goodies to take up there.

For power, Subaru's 185-horsepower 2.5-liter BOXER (horizontally opposed) four-cylinder engine is quite a strong performer. You do not

need a turbocharger to do what most Forester Wilderness owners will do – go somewhere. Combined with the continuously variable transmission and Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive system, the Forester is designed to get through the toughest of winters and the nastiest of storms.

With the Wilderness, the added dimension of the dual-function X-Mode and its Low Speed/Low Ratio Gradient Control helps to manage a lot more conditions over the average Forester. The X-Mode controller now includes additional traction settings for snow – including deep snow – dirt, and mud. These setting enable the system to allow for additional wheel slip to power through adverse conditions.

To make things more livable in these adverse conditions, the Forester Wilderness rides on a higher ground clearance at 9.2 inches – up from 8.7 inches in normal Foresters. A half-an-inch might not appear to be a huge improvement, but it does matter when you're traversing rougher road surfaces and washed our trails. The Forester Wilderness adds a front skid plate to protect the engine area from below.

Subaru also redesigned the front and rear bumpers of the Forester Wilderness by adding additional protective cladding and to improve the angle of approach and departure. To some, it might not be a looker. But, if you care about how your vehicle will perform away from the highway, it might the most beautiful part of the Forester Wilderness.

To finish up the Forester Wilderness exterior and functional package is a set of 17-inch matte black finished alloy wheels. They wear a set of Yokohama GEOLANDAR all-terrain tires. Some may like the look of a larger wheel and a lower sidewall, but one should be cognizant when you scratch them up in some deep rut – or on the curb outside your favorite restaurant.

This ruggedized Subaru Forester may look like its ready to go anywhere you point it to. But, does it really do the job?

In short, "yes."

If you want to see how the Forester Wilderness work, find a dirt or gravel road, and twist the X-Mode knob to either Snow/Dirt or Deep Snow/Mud. Depending on the conditions you are driving in, the X-Mode works. It gets the Forester Wilderness through no matter what you put it on.

If there is a reason why the Subaru Forester is so popular with LGBTQ motorists, take a seat and look out front, back, and all around. While its competitors were designed with sleeker glass area and rakish rear rooflines, the Forester has the best outward all-around vision in its class. The rear window is huge, the blind spots are very visible, and the beltline – the area where the glass meets the side of the body – is lower. All of this makes a world of difference.

Read more, log on to lavendermagazine.com ∎

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Norfolk, NE

BY ELLEN KRUG

My very first Pride event was in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 2004, when I was freshly out, and naively believed that I was a gay man with a rabid panty fetish. (Boy did I get that wrong; it turned out that while I love men, it's only if I can do that as a woman!)

In Cedar Rapids, on a sweltering June day, there were maybe fifteen booths and at most fifty people in a downtown park. Yet, it was something real when being visible still wasn't common or necessarily safe, and when realness was all that mattered.

Three years ago, I spoke at the Grand Marais Pride event. Before my talk, I joined thirty or so queer people and allies as they waved rainbow flags and carried signs for a "parade" through the town's business district. Thankfully, there was nary a negative car horn honk or even a condemning look along the entire parade route.

More recently, I discovered what I consider to be the most organized, best networked Pride group in any small town in America.

Its location?

Norfolk, Nebraska, population 24,955.

Yes, that's right, the most dynamic small town Pride organization I've ever encountered is in nowhere Nebraska, in a town that's only reachable by windy two-lane roadways.

And yet, Norfolk Area Pride (NAP) is rocking it.

NAP was founded three years ago by a physician, David Cockrum, a former U.S. Air Force colonel and operational commander who had the distinction of being the highest-ranking Air Force service member in a same-sex marriage. After his military service, David landed in Norfolk to work at the local hospital.

David's inspiration to found NAP came when he and his husband took part in the 50th Stonewall Pride celebrations in New York City. David was overwhelmed with its atmosphere of acceptance and joy, and he returned to Norfolk determined to create a Pride organization that included LGBTQ people and other marginalized humans.

Within short order, David and several volunteers had NAP up and running. Despite the pandemic, the organization hosted its first Pride event last fall, where it attracted nearly 800 attendees, many of whom weren't LGBTQ.

It was because of NAP's focus on both LGBTQ folks and the community at large that I recently spent time in Norfolk, where I presented my Gray Area Thinking® human inclusivity training twice. The stint also included giving a "Transgender 101" talk at the local community college, which had partnered with NAP to bring me to town.

Several things set NAP apart from any other Pride group I have ever encountered. For one, they were darn organized. A week before I was set to arrive, they forwarded not one, but two itineraries—one for the day and a half that I would be presenting and another one for where I'd be staying (with contact/credit card information) and the location of the two McDonald's restaurants in town. (Ah, regrettably, I'm a fast-food junkie with McDonald's fish sandwiches and cheeseburgers as my drugs of choice.)

More importantly, I arrived at the city's very modern public library forty-five minutes early to find a team of volunteers ensconced in a large conference room with fifty printed attendee nametags—including the businesses or organizations they represented—alphabetically organized and awaiting recipient.

On the other side of the room was a table of delightful finger food and desert—professionally arranged and quite enticing, created by a volunteer who obviously merited her own restaurant chain.

This wasn't a hack operation one bit. The room was set with fifty chairs, each having a flyer perfectly positioned on seat center for absolute symmetry. Someone was quite neurotic about that, but for a perfectionist like me, the image was nirvana.

Most of all, the NAP folks did their homework by spending countless hours networking to invite as many "important" people from the city as possible. The hard work paid off with two full house events that had the city's mayor, its fire chief and lieutenant, and two seventy-something nuns from a local monastery in attendance. Business leaders, educators, health care professionals, and a therapist also showed up for a wonderful mix of humanity.

In other words, NAP very astutely understands that to succeed in small town America, a Pride organization must be inclusive of everyone. That's something that I simply adore about the NAP team—they're working to break all kinds of barriers.

If we're going to win the fight for acceptance—for a place at the table—we need to have a chair for everyone who's never been invited to the meal.

And that's really the point, right?

There are thousands of small towns in America—other "nowheres"—that would benefit from studying and then replicating NAP's model. I'm thankful that I had the opportunity to work with such a first-rate group of people!

It's simply so wonderful to see queer people succeed! ▮

Ellen (Ellie) Krug, the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change, speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign-up for her monthly e-newsletter, The Ripple. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.

Who Asked You?

BY JAMEZ L. SMITH

Being this old
this broken
Is a blessing

And exhausting

Dismiss my tears
Condemn me

Misread my smile
Deny me

Project your fears
Reject me

You've not the slightest clue
Can't hear my truth
Much less know it

Blind to it
From the start

You can tell no one
Who they are
Who they should be
What they are
Or aren't
Stop it

Just stop

I am
Always been
Will always be

Manifest by choice

My choice
Not by your permission

I exist
Not by your grace

Your opinion
Of my experience
Irritates
Is irreverent
Irrelevant
And unrequested ▮

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